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A Case Analysis of Normal Community High School: An Inside Look at Public Education

David A. Parent
Department of Commerce and
Business Administration
Campus Honors Program

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A Case Analysis of Normal Community High School An Inside Look at Public Education

David A Parent

Education and Decline An Introduction

There is much conversation occurring in today's American society about the decline of the United States. Despite winning the cold war, many Americans still feel the US role as the number one world power is slipping away at least facing strong challenges. In discussing the reasons for America's problems, blame has been placed in several areas: a non-responsive federal government, a business environment unable to adapt to emerging world trends, and powerful foreign competition.

Some suggest that the US educational system is also a contributing factor to the perceived decline of the nation. In Joseph Nye's *Bound to Lead*, two business leaders say it is not inconceivable to foresee a second class future for the United States resulting from a poorly prepared and poorly educated work force.¹ Ross Perot emphasized the poor performance of our schools during the 1992 US Presidential election. As he states in his book *United We Stand*, failing schools and shoddy performance are undermining our nation's ability to compete and our children's expectations for the future.² Additionally, in the book *Winning the Brain Race*, David Kearns and Denis Doyle say public education has put us at a competitive disadvantage—our work force doesn't have the skills an information-based economy needs.³

These critical comments about US education are not merely rhetorical as figures seem to support such conclusions. Lester Thurow, in *Head to Head*, reveals that the United States' high school dropout rate is 29 percent compared to only 6 percent in Japan and 9 percent in Germany.⁴ Nye also explains that even high school graduates are not prepared for further study: only 7 percent of seventeen-year-olds are ready for college level science, 60 percent lack the reading ability to find and explain complex information, and 70 percent cannot write an adequate letter.⁵ According to Perot, America's best students are unable to compete with the best from other countries.⁶

With the pervasive belief that education is a critical factor in determining the success or failure of our nation and statistics showing US schools performing at unsatisfactory levels, there is a call abroad for change in the US public school system. Change is encouraged by many: politicians, economists, political scientists, businessmen, and others. Unfortunately, relatively little has been heard from those who should know most about the education process: school teachers and administrators. A recent *New York Times* article stated the critique of schools comes more from the so-called cultural elite than it does from the grass roots.⁷

A review of literature indicates that many of the studies of current public education focus on schools that are considered the very best or the very worst. These examinations are important. However, we need comparable emphasis on schools that are more traditional. Average schools are not being given much attention. These two deficiencies in current education discourse—not hearing from teachers and administrators and not hearing about average schools—prompted the conduct and form of this study.

1 Joseph S. Nye, Jr. *Bound to Lead* (Basic Books: New York, 1990)

2 Ross Perot, *United We Stand* (Hyperion: New York, 1992)

3 David T. Kearns and Denis P. Doyle, *Winning the Brain Race* (ICS Press: San Francisco, 1991)

4 Lester Thurow, *Head to Head* (William Morrow and Company, Inc.: New York, 1992)

5 Joseph S. Nye, Jr. *Bound to Lead*

6 Ross Perot, *United We Stand*.

7 Barbara Presley Noble, "The Future Wealth of the Nation," *New York Times*, 13 September 1992, p. 25

Description of the Investigation

This paper examines a US public high school Normal Community High School (NCHS) in Normal Illinois. The goal of this study was to obtain an understanding of this public high school. Conversations with people who have firsthand knowledge of the high school and its operations provided this understanding.

Interviews were conducted with the following participants in the school:

Alan Chapman	Principal NCHS
Howard Davis	Assistant Superintendent McLean County Unit 5 Schools
Jerome Hayden	Mathematics Department Head, NCHS and Unit 5 Schools
Linda Ingold	Assistant Dean of Students NCHS
Phil Keeley	Guidance Counselor NCHS
Brenda Melcher	Director of Staff Development and Community Services McLean County Unit 5 Schools
Joe White	Social Sciences Department Head NCHS and Unit 5 Schools
Gary Woods	Athletic Director NCHS and Unit 5 Schools

The central theme of the interviews with these school "insiders" was the potential educational decline at their high school. An emphasis was also placed on actions being taken by the school to improve the quality of education, as well as actions that these school employees feel should be taken to improve the school's performance.

To convey best the content of these conversations, I have organized the paper using the following sections:

NCHS—Background

Goals for NCHS

Constraints to providing a quality education

Catalysts to providing a quality education

Actions the school has taken

Recommendations for actions that should be taken

The paper then compares what these educators are doing and what they feel is necessary to further improve the quality of education at NCHS to what popular education experts suggest for improvement. The paper concludes with a brief summary.

Normal Community High School—Background

NCHS is the only high school in School District Unit 5 in Normal, Illinois. The town's population is approximately forty thousand. With its twin city, Bloomington, the combined population is one hundred thousand. The area consists of blue-collar and white-collar employment. However, Normal, where most Unit 5 students live, is notably more white collar than Bloomington (District 87 school system). In addition, enrollment data indicates that only about 7 percent of NCHS students come from low income homes, while statewide this figure is 32 percent (Appendix A). Largely as a result of this more affluent white collar environment, Mr. Davis says that generally the parents in this school district have high support for demands of and expectations for NCHS.⁸ Dr. Chapman also points out that IQ scores of students in Unit 5 school district

⁸ Howard Davis, Assistant Superintendent, McLean County Unit 5 Schools, interview by author.

are consistently one standard deviation higher than the national average⁹ Furthermore Mr Keeley says that including those who attend community colleges the school places 75 percent of its students in college¹⁰

However it is important to note that NCHS despite this apparent positive environment, spends only \$3 900 per student compared to state wide spending of just over \$5 000 (Appendix A) Similarly Mr Davis points out that some of the more affluent schools that NCHS competes with spend more than the state average For example Naperville spends approximately \$14 000 per student.¹¹ In addition the average teacher salary for NCHS is roughly \$4 000 less than other schools of the same size (Appendix A)

Racially NCHS has approximately 93 percent white students only about 5 percent black 1 percent Hispanic and 1 percent Asian These figures compare to 66 percent 21 percent, 10 percent and 3 percent statewide respectively (Appendix A)

After looking at this background information one might conclude that NCHS is not an average high school However I would consider this school to be in the "average" category for two reasons First, while the school's environment has some positive characteristics such as the above average intelligence of its students and the above average affluence of its constituents it also has some negative environmental factors These negative areas include below average expenditures per student and below average teachers' pay I also consider the school "average" because it is not at either end of the extremes in high schools that receive so much media attention NCHS is neither in ruin as some inner city schools for example those in East St Louis nor is it winning national acclaim for innovative ideas or high performance levels

Goals for NCHS

It was quite interesting that each individual with whom I spoke at the school had a different idea of the school's goals and even phrased it in different contexts Mr Davis the Assistant Superintendent stated his goal in terms of the school He said "it is the school's goal to do the best it can with what it has to work with"¹² NCHS Principal Dr Chapman put his vision of the goal in terms of the students—to help each student to develop to his or her fullest potential He added "irrespective of whether the student is going on to college or work the school should help turn students into responsible adults"¹³ Mr Hayden Head of the Department of Mathematics described his goal in terms of the curriculum—providing an overall strong education not focused too strongly in any one area.¹⁴ The Head of the Social Sciences Department Joe White focused his definition of the school's goal in an almost societal text—the school should produce citizens who are able to reason who have adequate knowledge for decision making and who value democratic principles¹⁵

Whether these differing goals have any impact on NCHS is not clear However it is possible that not having a well defined goal for the school is a constraint on the educational process along with the other constraints described in the next section

Constraints

For this presentation constraints are barriers either at a social community or student level that hinder the school's ability to provide a quality education to its students

The most commonly stated constraint cited by the insiders was a lack of funding for the school The common linkage between the conversations was not that there is less funding than before but simply that the

9 Alan Chapman Principal NCHS interview by author

10 Phil Keeley NCHS Guidance Counselor interview by author

11 Howard Davis interview

12. Ibid

13 Alan Chapman interview

14 Jerome Hayden Head of the Department of Mathematics at NCHS interview by author

15 Joe White Head of the Social Sciences Department, NCHS interview by author

school is now asked to do more without corresponding increases in funding. All of the professionals I interviewed feel that these additional demands are putting a strain on the quality of education provided.

An additional demand on NCHS requires the school to participate in the fight against crime, drugs, and gangs. Dr. Chapman, NCHS Principal, says that these problems have especially increased in the last five years at the school.¹⁶ Mrs. Ingold, Assistant Dean, is very concerned with the growth of criminal activity at the school. She believes that gangs, in particular, are interfering with the school's ability to educate by diverting time, attention, and resources away from education.¹⁷

Health issues are also being attacked through the schools. Assistant Superintendent Howard Davis notes that sex education, specifically pregnancy and AIDS education, are prime examples. He points out that increases in the incidence of tuberculosis and hepatitis may also bring pressure on the schools to prevent these diseases.¹⁸

Mr. Hayden says that his students bring to school more than ever before a host of psychological and social problems. He feels the schools and teachers, in particular, are being put in a situation in which they have to deal with these problems. He cites the increased number of broken families, teenage pregnancies, and cases of abuse in the home as some of the causes of the students' psycho-social problems.¹⁹

Schools are being used for welfare purposes as well. Mr. Woods cites the example of a nationwide trend towards schools serving breakfast in order to guarantee that low-income students have had at least a minimum amount of nourishment before starting the school day.²⁰

The school is basically being forced into a situation of tackling society's problems head on. Dr. Chapman feels that it might be logical to use the schools to do so, but to expect the schools to provide all of these services while not providing the necessary funds and necessary specialized personnel to do so is unrealistic.²¹ The result of having these non-education programs without proper support, is an erosion in the quality of the basic education provided. As Mrs. Melcher describes, "Non-educational issues are taking up educational time and funding."²²

Another constraint on this school is the increase in class size. NCHS's current average class numbers, twenty-four, while the state average is nineteen (Appendix A). Dr. Chapman points out that even though the district is opening a new building in 1995, his school is growing at such a rate that classrooms will be full at both buildings immediately upon occupancy.²³ Increased class sizes decrease the quality of education that each student receives, since each student gets less personalized attention. Larger class sizes can also affect the morale of the teaching staff, which can indirectly hurt the quality of education a student receives.

Another commonly raised obstacle to providing a high quality education to the school's students is student attitudes. Dr. Chapman says that there are some students who are simply not concerned with getting a quality education. He believes that it is quite difficult for the school to help these students.²⁴ One insider believes that this lack of concern for getting an education is quite evident in his classrooms. After many years of teaching, he has found that he is having to take some measures he "never thought he would have to take" in order to get students to study. Mr. White elaborates that the problem is school is no longer considered a place of education but is looked upon as a social institution. Students look at the time they spend in classes as the price they have to pay to be with their friends, go to school parties, and play sports.²⁵

¹⁶ Alan Chapman, interview.

¹⁷ Linda Ingold, Assistant Dean, NCHS, interview by author.

¹⁸ Howard Davis, interview.

¹⁹ Jerome Hayden, interview.

²⁰ Gary Woods, Athletic Director, NCHS, interview by author.

²¹ Alan Chapman, interview.

²² Brenda Melcher, Director of Staff Development and Community Relations, McLean County Unit 5 Schools, interview by author.

²³ Alan Chapman, interview.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Joe White, interview.

There is also agreement that the attitude problem is not restricted only to the students but is also seen in their parents. The common belief among these professionals is that parents are less supportive of the school and its teachers than they used to be. The school or individual teachers are often blamed when a student does not meet his or her parental expectations. This lack of respect on the part of the parents then flows to their children making it more difficult for the teachers to gain the respect that teaching requires. Mr. Hayden reveals that parent complaints in his department are up ten fold. He also feels it is curious that parents will complain about a child being bored in class or about a child failing a course but will not do anything in the home to push the students. One insider says it is a myth that parents know what is best for their children. He feels the ideal educational environment is one where parents give the school system their kids at age five and the school returns them at age eighteen.²⁶ His point is that parents need to support the school and their children and not undermine this support by constantly questioning the acts of the school. He feels that there is room for parent input but when it comes to education educators know best. Dr. Chapman summarizes the attitude problem as a general lack of respect for authority both on the part of students and parents.²⁶

The final common constraint raised was one regarding the basic nature of public schools. Dr. Chapman states that the American public school system is being unfairly compared to those of other countries. He explains that US schools are given a challenge that these other countries are not—to provide the same high level of education to all students. In foreign countries students are separated based on their achievement or their parent's income and the result is that all students do not get the same quality of education. He says in the United States this is seen as unacceptable—all students have the same right to the same high level of education. It is not that he is opposed to this doctrine in fact he strongly supports it, but he feels it is thus unfair to compare US schools to those abroad.²⁷ Mr. Hayden explains that since US students have such varying degrees of ability despite honors and remedial programs US public schools must aim at middle students. Due to the focus on a middle range student, students as a whole cannot be pushed as hard as they might be if they were divided by ability.²⁸

Catalysts

In this study catalysts are the opposite of constraints because they add to the ability of the school to provide a sound education to its students.

The most commonly acknowledged catalyst of NCHS is the high quality of its teachers. Mr. White points out that the teachers at the school are truly committed to doing their best for the students. He also says that because Normal is seen as a very pleasant place to live and raise a family people really want to teach there.²⁹ Mrs. Ingold says teachers who come to Normal expect to retire in Normal.³⁰ Mr. White feels that this allows the school to be selective in hiring new teachers. In this manner the school is able to hire teachers who are not only highly capable but also committed to excellence in teaching.³¹

The school's "teacher based program" also allows the school to better educate its students. Mr. Davis points out that for quite some time the school has had a bottom up approach to decision making. He explains that this approach allows teachers to be responsible for selecting the courses offered, the books used, the instructional methods used, and the goals for their programs. He explains that in other districts he knows the administrators or outside consultants make these decisions but he feels results show teachers are the best qualified persons to make these decisions. Mr. Davis feels this commitment to teacher based decision making is shown in the fact that there are the same number of administrators at Unit 5 as there were in 1963 when the

²⁶ Alan Chapman interview

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Jerome Hayden interview

²⁹ Joe White interview

³⁰ Linda Ingold interview

³¹ Joe White interview

school district was much smaller³² (However Mrs. Ingold feels more administrators are needed to handle not only increased size but also new demands on the district)³³

Some of the interviewees also felt that a conservative attitude towards adopting new policies has also shown to be a strength of the school. With the alleged decline of American schools there are many new experimental teaching or administering approaches that are expected to solve the school's problems. Mr. Davis and Mr. Hayden both feel some schools spend a large amount of time, effort, and funding to change their programs according to such new experimental methods, often only to find that the end results are no better or possibly even worse. They both think a school must carefully evaluate new techniques before following the latest craze in education. They believe one of the strengths of NCHS is that it has not jumped on every educational bandwagon. They feel that schools need to be willing to change but not solely for the sake of doing so.³⁴

What the School has Done

In light of the recent criticism of public schools, all schools are under the public's scrutiny. Schools are being asked to and, in fact, many are attempting to make changes to enable them to provide a better education. This section describes some of the changes that NCHS has adopted. Despite the aforementioned conservatism, the school has adopted some changes, whether by legislative mandate or by internal choice, to provide a better education.

As already mentioned, the school adopted a teacher-based decision-making approach many years ago. This was an attempt to put course, text, and other instructional decision-making in the hands of those who should know what the students need most—the teachers. Mr. Davis added that teachers' input has been expanded into the traditionally administrative areas of cutting costs and waste. Teachers are now asked to put in writing to the administration the areas that they feel could be eliminated or restructured to cut costs. He feels that teachers could greatly help in this area but have been, for the most part, left out of this type of decision-making.³⁵

The most profound change the school has undergone has been a result of state-wide legislation under Illinois Senate Bill 730. According to Mr. Davis, the legislation was passed as a way to both improve school performance and to increase the accountability of the public schools to their respective constituencies. The state used to check schools only to insure that teachers were certified and that the schools met certain facility requirements. As a result of the legislation, the state now checks for four additional items in schools.³⁶

The first requirement is that each school system must have a set of outcome goals for each major curriculum area. These goals must trace specific capabilities a typical student should have in the curriculum area at each grade level the student enters in the school system. For example, a specific outcome objective for all fourth-grade math students might be "knowledge of the multiplication tables from zero to nine." The state provided each school system a set of such goals (but NCHS decided to make the goals more specific in order to enhance the understanding and implementation of the goals).

The second requirement is that each school must have a system to measure whether the goals are being achieved. Such measurement may be taken through such annual tests as the Stanford Achievement Test Series. At the high school level, college entrance exams such as the American College Test (ACT) or Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) may also be considered. To help provide a system of measurement, the state also requires schools to test their students with the Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP). The test is administered to students in grades three, six, eight, and eleven. Historically, the test only covered the major curriculum areas such as math, science, and English, but beginning this year it will include social sciences.

³² Howard Davis interview

³³ Linda Ingold interview

³⁴ Howard Davis and Jerome Hayden interviews

³⁵ Howard Davis interview

³⁶ Ibid

The third requirement under the legislation is that each school must annually report how well it is performing. The state has also provided guidance in meeting this requirement through the use of the annual school report card (Appendix A). Each school is required to provide the state with certain information each year. The state compiles this information and reports it back to the schools, including comparisons to state and national averages where applicable.

The final requirement of this program is that each school must provide a plan of improvement. This plan is two-fold: each school must have a plan for improving general school performance. However, each school must also establish a program for assisting individual students who score poorly in one or more testing areas.

The state monitors schools for these requirements through both the school report card and on-site inspections by state examiners. Failure to meet one or more of the requirements can result in a school being put on the Academic Watch List. Schools put in this category will face greater monitoring, greater state involvement in decisionmaking at the school level, and, in severe cases, possibly even state takeover of the school. However, Mr. Davis feels that the likelihood of the state taking control of a school is not very high.³⁷

NCHS has complied with all of these requirements, but the results of doing so are not certain. Mr. Davis feels that having a clear set of goals for each student level will help teachers better coordinate their efforts. He also feels that teacher planning will also improve since teachers will know exactly what students are expected to learn.³⁸

Dr. Chapman feels that the legislation was well intended, but the results will not be impressive. He feels the legislation is doing little but increasing the amount of paperwork the school must produce. He points out that at the high school level, tests are performed in the spring of the junior year. This means an improvement plan for students deficient on this test will likely not become implemented until the student's senior year. He feels one year is not enough time to bring some students up to acceptable performance levels. He also points out that students with low scores are not required to take any additional courses outside those required for graduation. Therefore, the school might be put in a situation of improving a student in an area where he or she plans to take no more courses. He also notes that the school report cards, which NCHS distributes to parents, are not really examined by the public. He cites a meeting the administration held and advertised to review the report with interested parents that no parents attended.³⁹

Mr. Hayden says his department has implemented the requirements, but the change has had little effect on the program. His personal opinion is that the legislation was purely political and will likely not benefit students at all. Like Dr. Chapman, he also notes that students who show deficiencies are usually not interested in taking additional courses or doing any outside work in order to raise their achievement level.⁴⁰

The school has also attempted to improve teaching quality by providing various opportunities for teachers to learn new teaching methods. The school sponsors workshops and programs aimed at providing teachers with opportunities to learn the latest in teaching methods.

A Citizens Advisory Council has also been established to increase parental understanding, input, and support in the school process. This council is an open forum between administrators, teachers, and parents and allows interested parents to ask questions or give input about the school.

Dr. Chapman also points out that the school has just created a Disciplinary Committee that is chosen independently of the school's administration and consists of three students, three parents, and three faculty members. The committee was formed to provide the administration with guidance and recommendations concerning disciplinary rules and implementation. The goal of creating such a committee is to get a wider range of opinions as to how the school should be operated. However, it is also hoped that since there will be direct

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Alan Chapman interview

⁴⁰ Jerome Hayden interview

means for parents teachers and students to influence the administration s disciplinary functions such decisions will be more strongly supported by the represented groups ⁴¹

Recommendations for Improvement

All of the staff interviewed voiced opinions about improving NCHS performance Greater funding was the most frequently cited way for improving the school The need for this funding is a result of the greater demands being put on the school Increased use of the school to fight health drug crime and welfare issues requires more funding However Dr Chapman added that the school is also lacking in the number of computers it has for use in classrooms ⁴² Without more funding designated for the purchase of basic equipment, the school will not be able to keep pace with the rest of society from a technological perspective Mr Davis feels that increased funding could also help the quality of the school s education by allowing the school to update textbooks more regularly He says the school currently tries not to use books for too long a period but sometimes budgetary constraints prevent the school from acquiring new texts as often as it would like ⁴³

There is also general agreement that the school needs to provide better programs for those who do not plan on attending college As Mr Hayden said the school does a pretty solid job of preparing students for college but the school needs to provide better alternative programs for those who do not plan on furthering their education beyond high school ⁴⁴ Mr Keeley feels that for the approximately 25 percent of graduates who do not plan on going to college it is necessary for the school to provide a greater number of technical or skill oriented classes ⁴⁵ Mr Davis believes a good first step to providing greater vocational programs would be to require all students to be able to type prior to entering high school ⁴⁶ Mrs Melcher believes that the school s curriculum should be made more relevant for the non college bound She believes in taking real life situations then teaching the applicable English mathematics or science to be applied to the situation She says this type of teaching has been started at University High School also located in Normal She also believes student internships with local businesses would be helpful ⁴⁷

There was not full agreement on the addition of vocational services to the curriculum Mr White feels that all skills oriented programs should be eliminated He supports his argument by saying that high school is the only time that some students will ever experience Shakespeare or algebra He feels programs that would further remove students from the basics are in effect, cheating some students from their only opportunity to experience some areas of knowledge or thought Rather than favoring vocational programs Mr White feels teachers need to stress thinking more in their classrooms *He warns that high schools should not be seen as creating workers but people who are capable of thinking* ⁴⁸

Mrs Ingold and Mrs Melcher also believe that regardless of whether students are planning on attending college or getting a job after graduation far greater career counseling is needed ⁴⁹ Mrs Ingold also believes better post graduation tracking of students could prove to be beneficial ⁵⁰ Despite the lack of agreement on adding technical programs all of the NCHS insiders felt that the school needs to insure that programs are teaching students the ability to think, not simply to memorize facts and formulas Mr Davis adds that the school should try to incorporate greater analytical skills abstract thought problem solving and teamwork in the classroom in order to improve the education provided. ⁵¹ There was also agreement that the big four—English math science and social sciences—should receive greater emphasis A move towards a return to the

41 Alan Chapman interview

42 Ibid

43 Howard Davis interview

44 Jerome Hayden interview

45 Phil Keeley interview

46 Howard Davis interview

47 Brenda Melcher interview

48 Joe White interview

49 Linda Ingold and Brenda Melcher interviews

50 Linda Ingold interview

51 Howard Davis interview

basics was expressed by several of these individuals. They feel that some classes in other areas have diverted attention away from what they believe truly provides the foundation for a strong education.

As mentioned previously, there is a constraint on US public schools because they must cater to the needs of all students. Therefore, the focus of teaching is usually on the middle or average student. Because of this limitation, expanding the gifted program was also seen as a method to improve the overall performance of the school. A strong gifted program could improve the achievement of the more talented students, thus allowing the overall school performance to improve. Parents could also assist in this area. Rather than complaining to teachers about a student who is not being challenged, the parents should take action. Mr. Hayden feels that parents could easily solve the problem of a child being bored in an average class by having that child do outside reading or extra studying at home.⁵²

Mr. Davis is skeptical of gifted programs, however. He feels that one strength of a public school is the opportunity for students of all backgrounds and skill levels to interact. He believes that this interaction is quite valuable because this interaction is a part of everyday life as an adult. He feels that gifted programs may diffuse some of this interaction and, therefore, gifted programs should be structured in a way to insure that this intermingling is not eroded.⁵³

The insiders overwhelmingly believed that, although gifted programs may help, the real way to improve performance is to focus on students at the other end of the spectrum, the children who are having problems keeping up with even the "average" level. Mr. Hayden feels that the school will be able to improve most when it funnels more money and attention toward helping these students.⁵⁴ Students must be identified early in the educational system, and that is also when the help should be provided. It is too late to try to make up for deficiencies when the kids have reached high school. There is strong support for Head Start Programs to help low-income and potentially less-gifted students receive educational preparation in pre-school and early in the educational process.

There is also agreement that teacher quality could be improved. It is agreed that teachers need to do better in terms of keeping their expertise current. With knowledge continuously being added to or changed in various fields, teachers need to remain current with this knowledge. Those interviewed believe most teachers do an adequate job of staying current, but some do not. Mr. Davis feels that the key to achieving this is to bring teachers out of their individual classrooms.⁵⁵ Programs that the school has introduced, like conferences on recent teaching trends, are a good start, but more needs to be done. Mr. White feels that greater teacher training should occur before entrance to the profession. He feels that aspiring teachers should be required to receive a normal bachelor's degree during their undergraduate studies, then earn a master's in education before being allowed to become a teacher. He also feels that teachers should receive more practical training than the typical eight-week student teaching assignment during college.⁵⁶ Another suggested way of enhancing teacher performance is to provide more unstructured time between teachers and students outside the classroom. If teachers and students could have more than just a traditional teacher-student relationship, teachers would be in a better position to foster intellectual curiosity in their students.

Generally, it is not believed that freedom of school choice would enhance the performance of this school. Because it is the only high school in the Unit 5 district and because within the twin cities (Bloomington Normal) there are only two large high schools, school choice is not a realistic option. Logistics alone would prevent the school choice alternative from having much impact, because only so many students can attend each high school. Most of the "insiders" even fear the implementation of free choice in areas where logistics make it possible. They are afraid that a free choice system will add to the already wide disparity between the rich and the poor by allowing those with resources to get an even more superior education than those without. Mr. White, however, feels that this idea should be given some thought. He feels the choice option would break the cycle of

52 Jerome Hayden interview

53 Howard Davis interview

54 Jerome Hayden interview

55 Howard Davis interview

56 Joe White interview

schools continuing to do what they have always done. He wonders if schools are really able to substantially reform from within and feels competition might be able to provide the stimulus to do so. He also adds that the poor already get such a lower quality of education than the rich that school choice could not possibly make this disparity worse.⁵⁷

An underlying theme to what these professionals feel must be done is that this school and schools in general must change. Even those who favor conservative policies feel change is needed and can be beneficial if implemented properly.

Comparison of NCHS Findings to "Expert" Opinions

In terms of what the school has done, several of its actions are in concert with recommendations from experts. In *Thinking for a Living*, Ray Marshall and Marc Tucker suggest that schools should have clear goals for their students and an accurate way to measure student progress in achieving the goals.⁵⁸ Furthermore, President-elect Bill Clinton's *A Plan For America's Future* proposes a report card system for each state, school district, and school.⁵⁹ With the steps taken under Senate Bill 730, NCHS has both clear, written goals for its students as well as a system for monitoring student performance. Also, every public school in the state is issued a report card on its performance. Marshall and Tucker also recommend restructuring schools so that teachers are empowered to make many more of the key decisions about instruction than they had made before.⁶⁰ They also recommend greater parental input in this process.⁶¹ NCHS has had a teacher-based decision-making structure for years. It is also taking steps to include parents in the process, as evident in the establishment of the Citizens Advisory Council, created to open the flow of information and opinions between parents, teachers, and the administration.

There are some similarities, as well, between what the NCHS insiders feel are necessary actions in the future and what the popular critics of education are saying. For example, there is agreement that greater assistance is needed for students early in the education process, especially for the underprivileged. Several at NCHS felt this was the key to improving education at the school. Likewise, Clinton's program proposes the availability of pre-school for any child and greater funding for Head Start Programs.⁶² However, whereas those at NCHS generally felt the youngest age bracket of students should be the focus of improving education, Thurow believes that students in grades seven through twelve should receive the most attention, because this is where American student performance truly differs from the rest of the industrialized world.⁶³

There is also agreement about the makeup of the curriculum. Kearns and Doyle propose a curriculum that emphasizes the traditional core courses.⁶⁴ Those at NCHS also believe that the more traditional subjects, such as mathematics, English, science, and social studies, should be stressed. However, Kearns and Doyle would also like to see schools become known for specializing in a specific area of the curriculum, for example a school being known for its science or mathematics.⁶⁵ The people at NCHS disagree with this specialization. They believe that it is important for the school to provide a very strong, broad-based curriculum, not emphasizing one area too heavily.

Similarities exist, as well, on the opinions about the non-education demands being placed on schools. The NCHS insiders believe that the school being put in a situation of handling society's problems—crime, drugs,

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ray Marshall and Marc Tucker, *Thinking for a Living* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), p. 126.

⁵⁹ Bill Clinton, *A Plan for America's Future* (Little Rock, Ark., September 1992), p. 7.

⁶⁰ *Thinking for a Living*, p. 114.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 126.

⁶² "A Plan for America's Future," p. 7.

⁶³ *Head to Head*, p. 276.

⁶⁴ *Winning the Brain Race*, p. 166.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 164.

health and welfare issues—seriously hinders the ability of the school to perform. Thurow recognizes this and feels this cannot continue. He stresses that a school's main responsibility must be to educate.⁶⁶

There is also agreement that parents have to be willing to share more of the responsibility for educating their children. Thurow reports that 51 percent of parents in Taiwan purchased an extra workbook for their science students, whereas only 1 percent did so in the United States.⁶⁷

A striking difference in the opinions about future changes in public education between those at NCHS and the nation's education experts is in the area of free choice. Clinton Perot, Kearns and Doyle, and President Bush all believe that one key to reforming our public schools is to introduce free choice into the system. All of these leaders support some sort of system in which competition is present. They believe that competition will be the motivation and the stimulus for school reforms and better performance. The NCHS insiders, in general, do not agree. They believe that such a free choice system would not be logistically possible in Bloomington Normal. Not only do they feel the system would not be feasible in their community, but they also fear the results of such a switch in areas where it is feasible. They feel that most recommendations for free choice systems would result in affluent students improving the quality of their education, while poor students would see the same, or even poorer, quality of education.

Closing

Most public discourse on the decline of US public education has thus far been by noneducators and has focused on schools that are either performing very poorly or very well. This presentation was intended to provide a look at how one small sample of teachers and administrators think about the apparent erosion of quality in our public education system. The school analyzed in this study is an average high school, much more so than schools analyzed in typical studies. I hope analyses such as these will become more and more prominent as education is continuously scrutinized. By listening to educators who actually tackle the problems of our schools on a daily basis and by examining more traditional style schools, our country may better understand what reforms will improve our nation's public education system.

⁶⁶ *Head to Head*, p. 79

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 278

Appendix A

1992 School Report Card

**Normal Community High School
Normal Community Unit School District 5
Normal Illinois**

1992 School Report Card

**NORMAL COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL
NORMAL COMMUNITY UNIT SCH DIST 5
NORMAL, IL**

The Better Schools Accountability Law (Illinois School Code par 10-17a) requires all public school districts to report on the performance of their schools and students through school report cards

This report card includes information about the students the instructional setting the finances and student performance in your school and/or district Some financial information is from 1990 91 which is the most recent available Also displayed are statewide averages and for some information, averages by district type and size State averages are based on information from regular public schools only

Generally elementary districts have grades prekindergarten through eight high school districts have grades nine through twelve and unit districts have grades prekindergarten through twelve

Your child's school is in a Unit district

The grades in your child's school are 9 10 11 12

The parents/guardians of 71 6% of the students in your school 89 8% of the students in your district, and 91 1% of the students in the state made at least one contact with the students teachers during the 1991 92 school year

ABOUT THE STUDENTS

This section provides information about student characteristics for your school, district and state. Knowing these student characteristics can help you determine how student performance, instruction or the district's financial information may be affected. It can also indicate what kinds of programs or services may be needed in your school.

Racial/Ethnic Background and Total Enrollment

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/P Islander	Native American	Total Enrollment
School	92.9	4.7%	0.7% *	1.5%	0.1%	1,387
District	91.2%	5.5%	1.4%	1.7%	0.2%	7,731
State	65.6%	21.1	10.4%	2.8%	0.1%	1,815,128

White non Hispanic, Black non Hispanic, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander and Native American (American Indian/Alaskan Native) are the major racial/ethnic groups in Illinois public schools. In the last two decades, the percentage of minority students in the state has steadily increased.

Low Income and Limited-English-Proficient Students

	Low Income	Limited English Proficient
School	6.5%	0.4%
District	12.1	0.4%
State	32.0%	4.8%

LOW INCOME students are pupils aged 5 to 17 from families receiving public aid, living in institutions for neglected or delinquent children, being supported in foster homes with public funds or eligible to receive free or reduced price lunches.

LIMITED-ENGLISH PROFICIENT students are those who have been tested and been found to be eligible for bilingual education.

Attendance, Mobility and Chronic Truancy

	Atten- dance Rate	Student Mobility Rate	Chronic Truants (Number)
School	93.6%	10.9%	7
District	95.3%	12.6%	15
State	93.6%	20.4%	34,141

A perfect **ATTENDANCE RATE** (100%) means that all students attended school every day.

The student **MOBILITY RATE** indicates the portion of students entering or leaving the school during the school year.

CHRONIC TRUANTS are students who were absent from school without valid cause for 10% or more of the last 180 school days.

Type of High School Program

	College Preparatory	General Education	Vocational Education
School	77.6%	0.0%	22.4%
District	77.6%	0.0%	22.4%
State	63.6%	15.1%	21.3%

COLLEGE PREPARATORY shows the percent of seniors who, by local district standards, completed coursework that prepares them to attend a college or university.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION includes seniors who completed a planned sequence of vocational education courses at grades 11 and 12. Students in both college preparatory and vocational education programs are included in the college preparatory category.

GENERAL EDUCATION includes students who are in neither a college preparatory program nor a vocational education program.

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTIONAL SETTING

This section provides information concerning the instructional setting in your school and district. Most of these factors impact on what or how students learn.

Average Class Size

	High School
School	24.2
District	23.9
State	19.2

AVERAGE CLASS SIZE for the school is the average of the class sizes for the second and fifth class periods.

Percent of Enrollment in High School Core Subjects

	Mathematics	Science	English	Soc. Science
School	75.4%	62.0	102.2%	72.6%
District	81.5%	71.9%	100.5%	75.2%
State	82.8%	69.8%	103.7%	77.5%

The PERCENT OF ENROLLMENT is the number of students enrolled in a subject divided by the total high school enrollment on the last day of school and multiplied by 100. It may be greater than 100% since some students take more than one course in a particular subject area.

Teachers by Racial/Ethnic Background and Gender

	White	Black	Hisp.	Asian/ P. Isle.	Native Amer.	Male	Female	Total Number
District	99.1%	0.7%	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%	22.8%	77.2%	439
State	84.1%	13.2%	2.1%	0.6%	0.0%	27.6%	72.4%	105,814

Statewide, White teachers are an overwhelming majority of the teaching staff. Female teachers outnumber male teachers by more than 2 to 1.

Teacher/Administrator Characteristics

	Average Teaching Experience	Teachers with		Pupil Teacher Ratio Secondary	Pupil Adm. Ratio
		Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree		
District	13.9 Yrs.	56.1%	43.9%	25.2:1	222.2:1
Type	16 Yrs.	56.5%	43.2%	17.3:1	278.3:1
Size	16.2 Yrs.	52.5%	47.1%	18.7:1	299.5:1
State	15.8 Yrs.	54.3%	45.5%	17.5:1	251.6:1

Averages are also provided for district types and for district sizes by type.

TYPES: elementary, high school and unit

Sizes by type based on enrollment

	Small	Medium	Large
Elem	Under 244	244-1484	Over 1484
H.S.	Under 461	461-2401	Over 2401
Unit	Under 501	501-1627	Over 1627

Average for all Unit districts.

Average for all Large Unit districts.

ABOUT THE SCHOOL DISTRICT'S FINANCES

This section provides financial information for your district. Averages for the state and districts of the same type and similar size are also provided. Information in this section may be related to information in other sections (e.g. teacher salary with teaching experience and teacher qualifications).

Average Financial Indicators

	Teacher Salary 1991-92	Administrator Salary 1991-92	Operating Expenditure Per Pupil 1990-91	Per Capita Tuition Char 1990-91
District	\$33,714	\$55,274	\$3,931	\$3,494
Type	\$34,999	\$54,829	\$4,756	\$3,958
Size	\$37,096	\$57,469	\$4,195	\$3,676
State	\$36,508	\$58,540	\$5,066	\$4,383

Average for all Unit districts

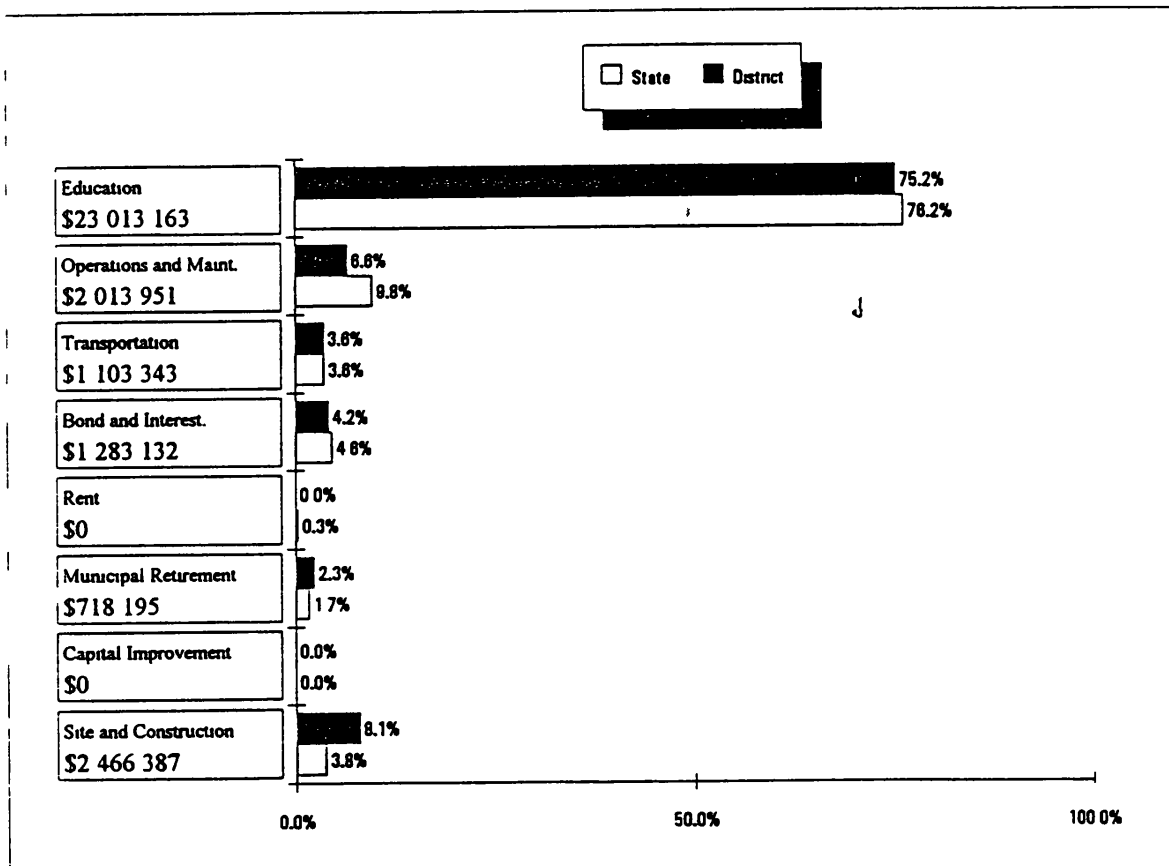
Average for all Large Unit districts.

The AVERAGE TEACHER AND ADMINISTRATOR SALARIES are based on full time equivalents

Effective this year, salaries include various monetary benefits and compensation such as tax sheltered annuities, bonus payments and retirement benefits which were previously excluded. Therefore, it is not appropriate to compare this year's salaries with those of prior years.

Note that the OPERATING EXPENDITURE PER PUPIL and PER CAPITA TUITION CHARGE are for 1990-91, the most recent available.

Expenditure by Fund, 1990-91



Total District Expenditures through the Above Funds \$30,598,171

ABOUT THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS

This section provides information about student performance including graduation rates, state test scores and the percent of students in the four quarters of national achievement tests. The amount of time for student assessment is also included in this section.

High School Graduation Rate

	1990-91	1991-92
School	86.9%	89.4%
District	86.9%	89.4%
State	78.0%	80.8%

The 1991-92 GRADUATION RATE compares the number of students who enrolled in ninth grade in the fall of 1988 with the number from that group who actually graduated in 1992. Adjustments have been made to the rate for students who transferred in and out of the school. It does not include students who graduated in the summer of 1992 or those who took more than four years to graduate.

Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP)

In April 1992, state assessments in language arts (reading and writing), mathematics and science were administered to students in grades 3, 6, 8 and 11. In 1991-92, students were assessed for the first time in writing at grade 11 and in science at all the four grade levels. Average scores for this year and last year are given for your school, district and the state.

Reading, mathematics and science scores range from 0 to 500. Writing scores range from 6 to 32. Score bands may be used to compare scores. There is no meaningful difference between two scores if the score bands overlap. For example, if the third grade reading score band for 1990-91 is 252-264 and the same score band for 1991-92 is 246-254, then the scores for the two years are essentially the same. If the score bands do not overlap, there is a meaningful difference between the scores. State score bands are not shown because they are very narrow.

IGAP Grade 11

Eleventh Grade School Enrollment When Test Was Administered: 443

	Reading						Mathematics					
	1990-91			1991-92			1990-91			1991-92		
	Score	Band	% Tested	Score	Band	% Tested	Score	Band	% Tested	Score	Band	% Tested
School	271	263-279	83	258	246-270	76	281	273-289	81	273	263-283	79
District	271	263-279	83	258	246-270	76	281	273-289	81	273	263-283	79
State	252			243			250			251		

	Writing			Science		
	1991-92			1991-92		
	Score	Band	% Tested	Score	Band	% Tested
School	26.8	26.4-27.2	75	29.1	28.1-30.1	79
District	26.8	26.4-27.2	75	29.1	28.1-30.1	79
State	26.1			25.0		

ABOUT THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS

Quartile Distribution in National Achievement Tests

The following charts provide the 1992 information on the distribution of students based on estimated national performance. Information is given for the IGAP as well as other national achievement tests administered locally to students in your school. The norm year is the year in which a test was given to a representative group of students in the nation under uniform conditions for the purpose of developing standard scales to compare student performance. Norm years for IGAP are reading 1988, mathematics 1988, and science 1991. Nationally, 25% of the students' scores will fall in each of the four quarters. If the percent for your school is above or below 25 in any of the quarters, it means that the performance of students in your school differs to some degree from the performance of those taking the same test across the nation.

IGAP Grade 11

	Reading				Mathematics				Writing				Science			
	Top	3rd	2nd	1st	Top	3rd	2nd	1st	Top	3rd	2nd	1st	Top	3rd	2nd	1st
	25 /	25 /	25 %	25 /	25 /	25 /	25 /	25 %	25 /	25 /	25 /	25 /	25 /	25 /	25 /	25 /
School	39	27	18	16	44	19	18	18	National norms not available				46	28	19	7
District	39	27	18	16	44	19	18	18					46	28	19	7
State	32	27	20	20	36	15	19	29					30	26	27	18

Other National Achievement Tests

Grade 11

Test Administered: STANFORD TEST OF ACADEMIC SKILLS FORM J
 Year Test Was Normed: 1988
 Grade Enrollment: 426

	Reading Comprehension					Mathematics					Science					Social Science				
	Top	3rd	2nd	1st	/	Top	3rd	2nd	1st	/	Top	3rd	2nd	1st	/	Top	3rd	2nd	1st	
	25 /	25 %	25 %	25 /	Tested	25 /	25 /	25 /	25 /	Tested	25 /	25 /	25 /	25 %	Tested	25 %	25 /	25 /	25 /	Tested
School	33	35	22	11	81.5	48	25	15	11	81.9						38	31	21	10	80.0
District	33	35	22	11	81.5	48	25	15	11	81.9						38	31	21	10	80.0

Testing Time Spent on State (IGAP) and Local Assessment

	Grade 11	
	IGAP	Local
School	240	310
District	240	310
State	240	338

TESTING TIME indicates the total amount of time in minutes each student spent on state (IGAP) and local assessment at various grade levels in 1991-92. Due to differences in the number of objectives assessed locally and the assessment techniques used, the amount of time reported for local assessment may vary considerably from district to district.

ABOUT THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS

American College Testing Program (ACT)

While the ACT is the test most often taken by Illinois students who intend to go to college not all college bound students take this test and not all students who take the test go to college ACT scores range from 1 (lowest) to 36 (highest) A core program is a high school program which includes at least 4 years of English and at least 3 years each of mathematics social studies and natural sciences Generally students who complete core programs earn higher average scores than those who complete less than core programs

Score bands may be used to compare Composite scores There is no meaningful difference between scores if the score bands overlap For example if the score band for 1990 91 is 19 5 21 5 and the same score band for 1991 92 is 20 4 22 0 then the scores for the two years are essentially the same If the score bands do not overlap there is a meaningful difference between the scores State score bands are very narrow

ACT--Students Who Completed a Core High School Program

	1990 91		1991 92							
	Composite		Composite		English	Math	Reading	Science Reasoning	Test Takers	
	Score	Band	Score	Band					Number	/ Class
School	23 1	22.3 23 9	23 8	23 1 24 5	22 8	23 6	24 5	23 9	151	35 0 /
District	23 1	22.3 23 9	23 8	23 1 24 5	22 8	23 6	24 5	23 9	151	35 0 /
State	23 1	23 1 23 1	22 9	22 9 22 9	22 3	22 8	23 3	22 6	24 589	23 6 /

ACT--All Students Tested

	1990 91		1991 92							
	Composite		Composite		English	Math	Reading	Science Reasoning	Test Takers	
	Score	Band	Score	Band					Number	Class
School	21 5	20 9 22 1	22 3	21 8 22 8	21 3	22 0	22 7	22 5	302	70 1 /
District	21 5	20 9 22 1	2 3	21 8 22 8	21 3	22 0	22 7	22 5	302	70 1 /
State	20 8	20 8 20 8	20 9	20 9 20 9	20 3	20 6	21 2	20 9	64 431	61 9 /

David A Parent is currently enrolled in the Masters in Business Administration program at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. He received a Bachelor of Science degree in Accountancy at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in May of 1993. As a member of the Campus Honors Program he participated in the ACDIS sponsored undergraduate Honors Seminar "Is the United States in Decline?" during the Fall of 1992. This paper, submitted as one of the requirements for the course, examines the high school from which Parent graduated in 1989 with an emphasis on the opinions of the school's teachers and administrators. His interest in educational issues was stimulated by the fact that both parents are teachers.